

10 JUL 1971

Ellsberg Recounts Tap On McNamara

Ex-Aide Says Military Secretly Recorded Secretary's 1964 Calls To Pacific Command

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Washington, July 9—Daniel Ellsberg, the former Pentagon official charged with illegal possession of top-secret documents on the Vietnam War, said today the military concealed from Robert S. McNamara that it had taped his telephone talks with Pacific commanders during the Vietnam war.

When Mr. McNamara learned in 1968 of the taping by reading a 1965 study made for the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the controversial 1964 Tonkin Gulf incident, Dr. Ellsberg said, the former Defense Secretary was "reluctant" to release the study.

"McNamara's testimony at the time (August 6, 1964, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in behalf of the Tonkin Gulf resolution sought by President Johnson) had been quite misleading and that I think was why he was reluctant to let that (1965) study go out," Dr. Ellsberg said.

1968 Testimony

Dr. Ellsberg was alluding to appearances by Mr. McNamara before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee headed by Senator J. William Fulbright (D., Ark.), during its 1968 investigation of the Tonkin Gulf affair. Mr. Fulbright had accused the defense secretary of suppressing in his 1964 plea for passage of the resolution data indicating the Navy had doubts about North Vietnam's attack August 4 of that year against two American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin.

President Johnson had seized the occasion of this attack, purportedly the second in two days by North Vietnamese torpedo boats on U.S. destroyers in the gulf, to launch retaliatory air

strikes against North Vietnamese torpedo boats and to get congressional authority to pursue the Vietnam war.

Both Mr. McNamara and Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State, spoke for the resolution, which passed the Senate with only two dissenting votes, by former Senator Wayne Morse (D., Ore.) and former Senator Ernest Gruening (D., Alaska), and passed the House without dissent.

Confusion Over Attack

The 1965 study, made for the Joint Chiefs of Staff by a weapons systems evaluation group and obtained by the New York Times recently, tells of an August 4, 1964, telephone talk between Mr. McNamara and Adm. U.S. Grant Sharp, the Pacific commander, in which the defense secretary learned that there was confusion over whether a second attack on the destroyers had actually taken place.

He was assured in a later talk with Admiral Sharp that the admiral was satisfied on the basis of information from the task group commander of the two destroyers that the attack was genuine. The study stated that the Pentagon had other confirming evidence, including intercepted radio messages from North Vietnam, saying that their vessels were engaging destroyers and that two of their torpedo boats had been sunk.

Dr. Ellsberg, at a breakfast meeting with a group of reporters here today, said the 1965 study had been "deliberately held" from the secretary when it was made, because "they did not want the secretary to know they had complete tapes of his telephone talks with overseas commanders in which the (Pentagon) serambler lines" had been used.

The study, he said, included records of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Mr. Ellsberg, who said he had access to the study before Mr. McNamara did, said one reason it had been held so closely by the Pentagon's joint military staff was that "there was a great deal of dirty linen in it," as well as the fact that Mr. McNamara's talks with Admiral Sharp "were revealing about their information and their uncertainty as to what had happened."

He said Mr. McNamara's reluctance to turn the study over to the Congress when he did learn of it in 1968 had been excused by Mr. McNamara on grounds it did not tell the whole story of why the administration performed as it did in regard to the Tonkin Gulf affair.

First Reading

At a February 20, 1968, appearance before the Fulbright committee, when Mr. McNamara was pressed for comment on the contents of the study, he said he had not read all of it and added, "I first learned of it a few days ago when you asked for it."

Dr. Ellsberg said he cited the episode as evidence of what he called "the multiple barriers" within the government to a free exchange of information.

He said that when he decided to leak secret documents to the New York Times and other newspapers, "I frankly expected to spend the rest of my life in prison."

He still expects a long stay there, he said, although his lawyers now question whether he can be convicted under existing law because his intent was not to harm the nation but the "opposite."

"Showed More Sense"

In the course of his discussion with reporters, Dr. Ellsberg said, he felt that "President Johnson showed more sense than any of his advisers" in his attitude on the war.

Dr. Ellsberg illustrated this by relating that he had been told by an observer at a White House meeting where Mr. Johnson was being pressed to send ships into the Tonkin Gulf to

the seas, the President had replied: "I've a right to go where I want, but that don't mean I

send Lady Bird and Linda to Lafayette Park at 3 in the morning."

In another development relating to the controversial Pentagon study, Mr. McNamara, now president of the World Bank, broke his silence by releasing a letter that described his motive for ordering it made.

The letter, from a former defense department analyst, Laurence J. Lejere, related part of a conversation with Mr. McNamara on July 20, 1968, in which the secretary explained what he had in mind.

It represented Mr. McNamara as having "commented that a thorough critique on Vietnam probably would do more to reveal the weakness of the national security process than almost anything that could be undertaken."

Mr. McNamara was represented as having said he would rule out participation in the critique by anyone who had been in a position of responsibility or who was in a position to influence its findings, but added "it would be all right to use me as a source of information."

He disclosed that he had already made (in 1967) arrangements for the collection "of data and records that would make such a postmortem feasible."

Those remarks, Mr. Lejere wrote that Mr. McNamara, seemed to define the objective of the enterprise as "a data collection for future use in the writing of a definitive postmortem."

Mr. McNamara has declined comment on the timing of the unauthorized release of the documents, including lengthy analyses by anonymous participants in the study, but reportedly always intended that it become public property at a time when it could be used productively and positively.

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